

Eric & The Kashmir Saffron Tea

by Richard Brugger

...was in town from Los Angeles the other day, having a late lunch at the Wild Lily Tea Room, a restaurant in Chelsea that features fifty kinds of tea and an indoor pond filled with large goldfish.
The New Yorker, July 22, 2002

It is not the wish of management that tea and fish intermingle.
Eric, an otherwise ordinary goldfish, obsesses about a world
outside the confines of the pond and incessantly ponders what to do.

On an unsuspecting Saturday, with a colossal spin of his dorsal fin,
Eric propels himself from the pond on to the Wild Lily Tea Room hardwood floor
with a nonchalance not usually attributed to a fish.

Immediately Eric's helplessly disoriented,
confused, not knowing who he is and what he's about,
frantically gulps for breath, slavers and writhes, about to expire, when a little girl,
bored with her mother's and aunt's engrossed conversation about another aunt
wanders about, visits the pond and sees, much to her amazement, a frantic Eric.
She rushes back to her table, unable to rouse her mother even with her catastrophic news,
she takes a lukewarm pot of Kashmir Saffron tea from the table,
returns to the pond-side and douses Eric.

Eric ingests the tea, oblivion fades, becomes luminescent, gloriously alive,
transformed, changed, metamorphosized, becomes---no kidding---a *bona fide*,
genuine, a for-real amphibian.

He thanks the little girl the best way he knows: smiles wide with his gills,
slaps his side with his pectoral fins.
The little girl returns to the table. Exclaims to her mother and aunt,
explains what's transpired. Her mother and aunt, still too immersed in conversation
about the other aunt, do not understand, they can't.

Meanwhile, back at the pond, Eric, giddily, thrusts himself back in the pool,
gathers together every fish,
imparts to them his incredible story.
If they wish, they too can become amphibian goldfish.

From that day forward, from closing to dawn---day after day--- every fish in the pond
takes over the entire dining area of the Wild Lily Tea Room in Chelsea.
Kashmir Saffron Tea is always----just always----in low supply.
The janitor complains to the waiters, the waiters to the headwaiter,
the head waiter to the manager innumerable times a day
of the disarray, the wetness, the dampness.....
The manager repeatedly responds: Condensation. What do you expect?
We have an indoor pond!